

# OFFICE OF U.S. SENATOR SHERROD BROWN

## Senator Murray's Prepared Remarks at the Second Annual Ohio College and University Presidents' Conference April 1, 2009

*Thank you so much Senator Brown, for that introduction.*

*And thank you all for that warm welcome.*

*Good morning – and welcome to Washington, DC! Before I begin, I want to thank Senator Brown for his work on education and workforce development issues. He's been an outstanding, and outspoken partner in advocating for working families. And, you all have a great champion in him.*

*As many of you know, I've been involved in education and job training for most of my career. In fact my experiences as a teacher and school board member are what helped launch my political career.*

*And as a member of the U.S. Senate, I've had the pleasure of sitting on the committees that determine education policy and funding, and of chairing the subcommittee that focuses on federal job training programs and legislation.*

*I want to thank all of you for traveling here from the great Buckeye State to talk about what's working, and what's not, for Ohio – and how we can apply those lessons to our efforts in Congress.*

*As I am sure you will all agree, the need to change the way we prepare all of our people -- youth, adults, and older workers -- for the working world is urgent.*

*I know that communities from Toledo, to Akron, to Cincinnati have been hard hit by this recession. And I know that none of our communities will recover unless we can create jobs and ensure that American workers have the skills and education they need to fill them.*

*And, our colleges, universities, and technical schools are a central part of that effort.*

*For our young people, they are the link between a high school diploma and that postsecondary credential that will pave the way to a brighter career.*

*For adults, they provide a pathway from just getting by to getting ahead.*

*And for the business community, you help prepare their workforce to take on the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs.*

*But in order to make all of those connections, it takes strong partnerships with leaders in your community who understand the needs of students, workers, and businesses.*

*And that's what I want to talk to you about today.*

<i>We Aren't Doing a Good Job of Preparing Workers</i>
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*The reality is that the labor market is changing – here and in many places around the world.*

*It used to be that a high school diploma was all you needed to get a good-paying job. But that's not the case anymore. Today, most jobs require at least some education past high school.*

*And here in the United States, this is something that has us very concerned for our future. There is a growing gap between the jobs that are available in our communities, and the workers who are qualified to fill them.*

*A third of our students don't graduate from high school on time.*

*And the numbers are even more disturbing for minority students – half of African-American and Hispanic ninth-graders don't graduate in four years.*

*And as you all know, math and science are a particular problem.*

*American high school seniors score near the bottom compared to their peers in other industrialized countries.*

*Far too often, students who do earn their high school diploma aren't adequately prepared for college-level work, forcing colleges and universities to invest scarce resources in remedial education.*

*These are dismal numbers. And they show we simply aren't doing a good job of preparing our kids to move on to the next step.*

*As a result, we're not just shortchanging our students, we're undercutting our ability to compete globally.*

*We need to make it a national priority to turn things around. And I'm not the only one saying that.*

*President Obama has drawn a line in the sand when it comes to investing in education. He's moved reform and resources to the top of the agenda and is standing strong in the face of overwhelming challenges.*

*Employers have also told me expanding the pool of highly skilled workers able to take the good jobs that will grow their businesses is critical to their success.*

*Education leaders like you tell us that if we don't change the way we think about preparing students for the next step in their academic and professional careers, we run the risk of leaving generations of young people behind.*

*And, industry and workforce leaders from every sector of the economy have told me that unless we do a better job of preparing students for the jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our nation will suffer.*

*And now, as we work to rebuild our economy, it's more important than ever before that we think seriously as a nation about:*

- *what isn't working,*
- *and what we need to do to meet the needs of all of our students and our communities.*

*Ultimately, I believe that how we handle this issue will make or break not just our economic recovery but our long-term economic health.*

## *Solutions*

*So where do we go from here?*

*As I see it, it's going to take three steps.*

*First, we need to build partnerships between schools, businesses, and other the many other groups interested in seeing our students succeed.*

*For too long, the reflex has been to blame our schools when our students fail. And when we talk about fixing the problem, we've focused on how teachers and the education system could do their jobs better.*

*But whether our students succeed is an issue that is critical to the future of each and every one of our communities. And we won't see success unless everyone with a stake in our future is a partner in making education work.*

*Second, we need to stop being afraid to make a break from the status quo, especially if it means supporting innovations that keep students engaged in school or open the door for them to come back.*

*And finally, we absolutely must back all of it up with adequate resources.*

*Let me take a minute to talk about one way I'm working to encourage these three critical steps.*

## *Career Pathways*

*Last year, I introduced a bill called the Promoting Innovations to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Careers Act – which I will be re-introducing this year.*

*My bill would help create partnerships to bring together state and regional leaders in:*

- *education,*
- *business,*
- *labor,*
- *workforce,*
- *and economic development to develop a vision for how their communities can prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century jobs.*

*Our challenge is to identify what works and why – and to replicate those efforts to help other students and communities prosper.*

*My bill will provide federal funding so that we can start closing the gap between the skills employers seek and the way we are preparing our students.*

*I was proud to have Senator Brown join me in that effort. And, I look forward to working with him as we move forward.*

*But this is certainly not the only step needed to address the workforce needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

*And that's why I'm also committed to seeing the Workforce Investment Act reauthorized – and my goal is to do that this year.*

*Our working families deserve a workforce system that is innovative and modern – one that can meet the needs of millions of unemployed and underemployed workers and the changing demands of a global market.*

*Beginning last fall, I've helped lead a bi-partisan effort in the Senate to move toward this goal.*

*We have finished the first of a series of listening sessions where we invited key stakeholders in the system, including those representing community colleges and adult education, to provide feedback about:*

- *what has worked and what should be refined and retained to help workers, job seekers, and industry;*
- *what key challenges need to be addressed;*
- *and what innovative policy ideas should be considered to modernize WIA.*

*And, we're preparing to move into the next phase of the process this spring.*

*I've also talked with Secretary Solis [soh-LEASE]. And I'm confident that she is committed to making it a top priority in her first year.*

#### *Financial Literacy*

*And before I close I just want to mention one other issue that I'm working on which will benefit from the partnership of local communities with our colleges and universities, and that is what I call the issue of financial literacy.*

*The reality is that one of the contributing causes of this recession is that too many Americans made poor, and often, uninformed financial decisions. And the problem isn't limited to mortgage holders.*

*Too many Americans – from high school students to senior citizens - don't know how to budget, manage credit card debt, or even to pay their bills on time.*

*We used to say the three 'R's' of school are "reading, writing and arithmetic." Well, I think we need to add a fourth 'R' – "resource management."*

*That's why I've introduced a bipartisan bill with Senator Thad Cochran of Mississippi aimed at helping people of all ages learn to manage their finances and make good decisions about housing, employment and education.*

*I believe that we can't ignore that millions of Americans walked into home loan offices, unprepared to make the right choices for their financial futures.*

*And I think that our Universities and Colleges are just the places to help turn that dangerous trend around.*

*That's why my bill will invest in providing financial education to any interested college students and adults in our 2-and 4-year colleges.*

*I look forward to working with all of you on this effort.*

### *We Have to Put Our Money Where Our Mouth Is*

*But as all of you know, the truth is we will never make progress unless we back up all these efforts with the necessary resources.*

*We have to think of investing in education and skills development as a fundamental part of keeping our economy healthy. And we need to provide the funding to keep it strong.*

*That's why I fought hard to ensure that the Economic Recovery Act includes investments to prepare students and workers with the skills and education they'll need to fill the new jobs created by stimulus. That includes:*

- \$4.2 billion in workforce funds that will provide assistance and skills training to workers impacted by the recession.*
- \$1.2 billion for summer and year-round employment for teenagers and college-age students*
- And provisions that help community colleges and training providers partner with their local workforce boards to provide skills training in high demand occupations.*

*All of these investments will help introduce youth to postsecondary careers and employment opportunities.*

*But as all of you well know, we also need to ensure that our young people can continue to access higher education.*

*And that is why I have long worked in the Economic Recovery Act and elsewhere to:*

- Increase Pell Grant funding,*
- Bring down student loan interest rates,*
- Make loan payments more affordable,*
- And provide tax credits for families struggling with the cost of college.*

### *Closing*

*But if I leave you with one message today, it's that we have to change the way we think about the connections between education, our economy, and the workplace – now.*

*For too long, we've seen schools as acting independently from our economy. But the truth is that the academic performance of our students – and our economic performance – are directly related.*

*And as nations around the globe work to pull themselves out of the recession we face, the most successful will be those that are able to ensure their workforce is competitive in the global marketplace.*

*At the end of the day, jobs and industry will go where the best-trained, most competitive workers are.*

*I believe that innovation and public-private partnerships are critical to making sure our schools can produce the workforce of the future.*

*The challenge we all face is how to make it happen. And I hope I've started a discussion about how we can start doing that.*

*It takes:*

- *policy,*
- *resources,*
- *and most of all a national conversation and focus.*

*And I thank you for making me part of that conversation today.*